

Snapshot by coneygoil

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Summary:

Snapshots of Mike and Eleven's life after she returns from the Upside Down.

1. Chapter 1

Laugh

The first time Mike heard Eleven laugh, he paused, caught off guard by the tiny sound of joy. Her smiles were small, a subtle curl of the corners of her lips, always reaching her expressive eyes – a Mona Lisa smile as some would say. Her laugh was no different – soft and kept to herself but always reaching her eyes. Her laugh became Mike's favorite sound besides her saying his name.

Photograph

Jonathan put his new camera to good use. It was awkward being a subject of his art, but after a few times, Mike just ignored the lens pointed his way and let Jonathan practice his skills. Mike had barely seen any of the older boy's work, a few photos here and there that Will shared with their inner circle.

One day, Will handed Mike a photo that surprised him - a candid moment between him and El frozen in black and white. They were on the couch, just the two of them, El curled up against Mike's side with her head on his shoulder. His arm rested on her legs, and Mike couldn't remember laying his arm there.

They looked so comfortable sitting there together. El's face was peaceful, gazing forward, her trust in him the most natural thing Mike had ever seen. Their physical contact was second nature now. It just happened without either of them thinking about it – the innocent touches, the comfort of being beside one another. That was them, and the photograph had captured their relationship perfectly.

Will said he could keep the picture. Mike set it on his nightstand to keep close; close like he kept El in his heart.

Night Terrors

Mike had insisted on El having a real bed, but the blanket fort was where she felt safe. She had night terrors after returning from the Upside Down. The ash-ridden place held her captive, and her screams would shake the house.

His parents were concerned the entire structure would implode, and after a couple incidents were seriously considering finding her a more secure place to live. Just the mention of El being out of his reach again frightened Mike more than he could say.

"I'll take care of it," he reassured. His parents didn't seem convinced that he could solve the problem of the girl with superhero powers, but with everything that had happened to him, they gave their son a chance.

"I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about," he soothed. "I'll stay with you until all the nightmares go away, okay?"

That's how he started sleeping in the blanket fort.

"Mike, I don't want to go back."

"You won't." Mike laid his hand atop her hand that rested between them. "I promise."

El nodded, accepting his promise without any doubt. He'd always taken care of her, gentle and patient, the only person to recognize her needs and truly see *her*.

El slept in peace after he joined her, his presence the balm that she needed.

2. Strokes

With El's hair longer, Nancy picked up a brush for her to use. The poor girl was clueless on how to take care of her hair. Nancy couldn't imagine living her whole life with a shaved head. A girl usually prided herself on her hair, and to have that right taken away was wrong.

Nancy patiently showed El how to use the bristly contraption. "You start at the top and stroke down. See?" Nancy demonstrated on her own head then handed El the brush. "Now you try."

El eyed the brush warily.

"Go on," Nancy chuckled at the girl's suspicious expression, "it won't bite."

El hesitantly accepted the brush. She sunk the bristles in her hair at the top of her head, just as she observed Nancy doing, and stroked downward through her ear-length locks. A small smile crossed El's face as she stroked her hair a few more times, seeming to understand the concept.

Nancy was happy to help her new 'sister', and she found the girl many times in the following week walking the house brushing her hair.

One night Nancy descended the stairs to the basement to ask Mike a question, but stopped short at the scene she walked in on. El sat on the couch, crossed-legged; Mike on the floor in front of her, nose planted in a history book, studying. In El's hand was the brush Nancy bought her a week ago, and the girl was stroking it with much care through Mike's hair.

Nancy smiled, quietly watching the two kids oblivious to her presence. El looked so relaxed and content running the brush gently through Mike's hair. Never in a million years would Nancy have ever imagined her brother in their basement with a girl letting her brush his hair. She crept back up the stairs, not wishing to disturb the peaceful moment between them.

3. Kiss

“What’s it called?”

Mike looked up from the scale model of the Ecto-1 he was currently working on, giving a questioningly look at his companion. “What’s that, El?”

“What you did at school,” El’s vague reply didn’t give much to work off of. A lot of things happened at school when they were there during the assembly, and also when the bad men and Demogorgen had threatened them.

Mike offered her a half-smile. “You’re gonna have to give me more than that.”

El lowered her eyes, and he could tell she was mulling over whatever it was she was trying to say. Before it registered in Mike’s mind what she was doing, El leaned over the coffee table and pressed her lips to his.

Mike felt his whole body lock up at the touch of her lips. El didn’t dive in like he had during their first kiss. Her movements were slower, more precise like she’d been contemplating just how the action should play out. By the time Mike’s body had caught up with his mind, El was leaving his space and he followed her lips for a brief moment.

He met her gaze, a pretty blush stroking her cheeks. Mike felt heat rising into his own cheeks accompanied by a bashful smile El’s way.

“What’s it called?”

Mike swallowed hard. “That is called a kiss.”

“You kiss when you like someone?”

“Yeah. It’s a way of showing that person um...” Mike stumbled on his words. How would he explain matters of the heart when he didn’t quite understand them himself? “...how much you like them.”

The corners of El's lips curved just so, and Mike found himself being kissed again by the girl he was head over heels for. This time he didn't freeze up. He rose higher on his knees to deepen the kiss. His insides were doing somersaults at the thought that this was really happening. Just a couple years ago, girls had cooties and were dumb; now he couldn't imagine this girl away from his side ever again.

The kiss was simple and sweet, and they broke the connection, all goofy grins and red cheeks. El's eyes shined with a gleam that Mike had never seen in her before.

"I like you very much, Mike."

"I like you a lot too, El."

This time they both leaned in for one more kiss.